

Message Text

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ORIGIN HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 SS-15 L-03
PA-01 CA-01 VO-05 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
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DRAFTED BY HA/ORM:LARTHUR:CML
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P R 311950Z MAR 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 083315

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, IZ, SHUM, CVIS

SUBJECT: GROUP OF 34 IRAQI CHRISTIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

1. WE HAVE COMPLETED REVIEWS OF ALL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS
SUBMITTED BY GROUP OF 34 IRAQI CHRISTIANS WHO ARRIVED
AT JFK WITHOUT VISAS ABOARD AN AIR MOROCCO AIRCRAFT ON
JANUARY 28, 1978. IT IS OUR VIEW THAT NONE HAS ES-
TABLISHED A WELL-FOUNDED FEAR OF PERSECUTION BASED UPON
RELIGIOUS OR ANY OTHER GROUNDS PRIOR TO THEIR DEPARTURE
FROM IRAQ. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE INTENSITY OF THE GOI
PUBLIC REACTION TO THIS SPECIFIC INCIDENT, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE
FOR US TO ASSURE THE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION
SERVICE THAT MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP COULD RETURN TO IRAQ
WITHOUT EXPERIENCING SOME HARASSMENT OR OTHERWISE BE
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SUBJECT TO REPRISALS IMMEDIATELY UPON THEIR RETURN TO
IRAQ OR AT A LATTER DATE.

2. THE FOLLOWING IS THE SUBSTANTIVE TEXT OF OUR
REPLY TO THE INS ON THESE CASES:

"UPON CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVED

IN THIS GROUP'S ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES, IT IS OUR VIEW THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO IRAQ. THIS VIEW IS NOT BASED ON THE APPLICANTS

CLAIMS THAT THEY FEAR PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IF RETURNED TO IRAQ."

"REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE IN IRAQ HAVE BEEN CLOSELY MONITORING THE SITUATION IN THAT COUNTRY AND BELIEVE THAT THE POSITION OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ HAS UNDERGONE MARKED IMPROVEMENT IN THE LAST DECADE AND THAT MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ARE NOT SUBJECT TO PERSECUTION OR HARASSMENT ON THAT ACCOUNT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ. ANY INCONVENIENCES WHICH MAY BE SUFFERED BY MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY OR OTHER MINORITIES IN IRAQ APPEARS TO BE THE RESULT OF PREJUDICE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TO HAVE NEITHER THE APPROVAL NOR THE TOLERANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT. THAT OPINION IS SHARED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN BAGHDAD, INCLUDING THE PAPAL NUNCIO. WE, THEREFORE, DO NOT BELIEVE ANY OF THIS GROUP OF IRAQIS HAD ANY REASON TO FEAR PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGION PRIOR TO THEIR DEPARTURE FROM THAT COUNTRY."

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"HOWEVER, AS A RESULT OF THE PUBLICITY ATTENDING THEIR ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES AND THE WAY IN WHICH IT WAS EFFECTED, AN OFFICIAL OF THE IRAQI MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT "IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS INCIDENT DID NOT OCCUR BY CHANCE BUT WAS ARRANGED BY VARIOUS QUARTERS, IN THE FOREFRONT OF WHICH IS THE ILL-REPUTED AND ILL-BEHAVED US CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY..." THE HEAD OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ, IN REFERRING TO THESE IRAQIS HAS STATED THAT "THIS GROUP OF SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE CLAIMING ASYLUM ALLEGING RELIGIOUS PERSECUTIONS ARE GUIDED BY IMPERIALIST AGENTS AND ARE USED AS TOOLS IN THE SERVICE OF IMPERIALIST SCHEMINGS."

"BASED ON THE PUBLIC CLAIMS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ THAT THE CIA WAS BEHIND THIS GROUP'S ACTION AND OTHER ACRIMONIOUS IRAQI PRESS ACCOUNTS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THESE IRAQIS MIGHT BE TARGETS OF PROLONGED INTERROGATIONS AND POSSIBLE ARREST OR DETENTION IF RETURNED TO IRAQ. FOR THIS REASON,

IT IS OUR VIEW THAT THESE THIRTY-FOUR IRAQIS SHOULD
NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO IRAQ."

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3. FYI - WE HAD CONSIDERED ASKING USINT TO MAKE CLEAR
THAT UNLESS IRAQ WERE PREPARED EITHER TO PUBLICLY
RETRACT EARLIER STATEMENTS OR GIVE SPECIFIC ASSURANCES,
WHICH WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC DURING EXCLUSION PROCEEDINGS,
THAT EACH OF THE 34 IRAQI CHRISTIANS CAN SAFELY RETURN
TO IRAQ WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TO INTIMIDATION, HARAS-
SMENT, OR REPRISALS, WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO INFORM
THE INS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO
IRAQ. SUCH ASSURANCES AS IRAQ FOREIGN MINISTRY MIGHT
GIVE, HOWEVER, WOULD NOT BE CREDIBLE AND WOULD COUNT
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FOR NOTHING WITH INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY APPARATUS.
END FYI.

4. FYI - SINCE GOI PUBLIC REACTION WAS DIRECTED SOLELY
TO THIS SPECIFIC GROUP, THIS CIRCUMSTANCE EASILY DIS-
TINGUISHES THIS GROUP FROM OTHER IRAQIS WHO HAVE SOUGHT
ASYLUM IN U.S. WE WILL CONTINUE TO REVIEW SUCH REQUESTS
ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS. THIS DECISION NOT TO FORCIBLY
REPATRIATE THIS GROUP OF 34 DOES NOT SIGNAL A POLICY
CHANGE IN CONSIDERING OTHER IRAQI ASYLUM APPLICATIONS.
END FYI.

5. FOR BAGHDAD - WE WILL PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCT-
IONS ABOUT INFORMING GOI OF OUR POSITION IN ADVANCE OF
OUR ANSWER TO THE IRAQI DIPLOMATIC NOTE (STATE 66570)
ON THIS SUBJECT. WE SEE NO NEED AT THIS TIME TO
APPROACH THE GOI. COOPER

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